



**Friends of
the Earth
International**

Agroecology and Climate Justice:

A People's Guide to Paris and Beyond

Climate change, industrial agribusiness, and hunger – breaking the chain

Industrial food production is a lose-lose option for the world's people and our climate.

The industrial-scale agriculture and food system is mass-producing food that is at best lacking in nutrition, and at worst poisoning us. Its reliance on chemical inputs is destroying soil fertility, contaminating our soils and water sources, and depleting fisheries, all of which threatens tomorrow's harvests. At the same time, although we produce enough today to feed our global population, food is poorly distributed, with an estimated 842 million people being under-nourished.¹

Industrial-scale agriculture is also driving a process of land grabbing for corporate agriculture, driving small-scale food producers off the land and depriving communities around the world of the land they need to provide food and sustain their livelihoods and cultures. This is exacerbating the concentration of land ownership and management, and aggravating social inequalities. It is locking farmers into models of production that require costly inputs and royalty payments to corporations. For example, the seeds of small-scale farmers are being appropriated, and sold back to them at exorbitant prices, having been bred as varieties that depend on costly, contaminating agrochemicals.

On top of all this, industrial agribusiness is currently one of the main drivers of climate change. Formally it is estimated that agriculture was responsible for 11% of anthropogenic global greenhouse gas emissions in 2010.² However, if one also takes into account emissions related to chemical inputs, the expansion of the industrial meat industry, the destruction of the world's savannahs and forests to grow agricultural commodities, and the fuel used to transport, process and store food, this figure is estimated to be closer to 50%.³

At the same time, climate change is making farming and food production more difficult. Droughts, flooding and other extreme weather events are becoming more common, and weather patterns more unpredictable.

Agroecology as practiced by small food producers, and within

the framework of food sovereignty and climate justice, offers a recognised, equitable, flexible and climate-safe solution to these problems. Small-scale farming is already feeding 70% of the world's population.⁴ Agroecology is protecting soils, seeds, and territories, eliminating farmers' reliance on emissions-heavy inputs (such as fossil fuels and fertilisers), and building resilience to climate change. The promotion of agroecology for small-scale producers provides a real solution to the challenges of climate change, improving rural livelihoods and stopping hunger.

Climate Smart Agriculture: A False Solution

Governments, backed by corporations, have been constantly sprouting a range of 'false solutions' to climate change. The intention is to be seen to be managing the climate crisis whilst not compromising profits, power structures, or the economic system that got us here in the first place—even if that risks exacerbating the problem in reality.⁵ These 'false solutions' aim to engage the private sector in the climate change debate by creating profitable business opportunities, rather than regulating and providing public finance to address the real drivers of climate change. False solutions include carbon markets, genetically modified crops, biofuels, and now 'Climate Smart Agriculture' (CSA).

CSA is a concept increasingly used by governments and international institutions to refer to agriculture that has less impact on climate change. But this broad concept deliberately overlooks the fact that the industrial agrifood system is one of the key drivers of climate change.⁶ It fails to ask whether we actually need to increase food production, or change our model of food production.

At the same time CSA has been deliberately loosely defined, so that companies can use it as a marketing tool to re-brand and validate industrial agriculture. The Global Alliance on Climate Smart Agriculture (GACSA), launched during the UN Climate Summit held in New York in 2014, fails to exclude damaging and inequitable agricultural and food production processes such as genetic modification, the use of synthetic fertilisers, and intensive livestock farming. FAO also acknowledges that an expected increase in mechanised farming will reduce employment opportunities in rural areas.⁷

While pushing industrial-scale agriculture, however, CSA co-opts and hijacks the language of agroecology, blurring the boundaries between genuine agroecology and corporate-controlled industrial agriculture. CSA is being used to redefine agroecology as a narrow set of tools that would allegedly ease the problems associated with industrial food production and even climate change, without challenging the existing problems with the industrial food system. CSA will be used to 'greenwash' climate-damaging activities, and distract from the urgent implementation of real solutions. The promotion of CSA may also exploit indigenous knowledge systems and expertise and farmers' empirical and traditional knowledge.⁸

Overall CSA is shaping up as a new promotional space for the planet's worst social and environmental offenders in agriculture. Companies such as Syngenta (GM seeds), Kellogg's, McDonald's,⁹ Walmart¹⁰ and Yara¹¹ (the world's largest fertilizer manufacturer), are all at the 'climate-smart' table. So too are the International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA) and the Global Biotechnology Transfer Foundation.¹²

Monsanto is claiming that genetically modified (GM) agriculture is climate smart because it helps no-till farming and drought tolerance, even though after almost four decades of expensive research the technology has not yet produced a single useful climate change-related trait.¹³

Moreover, carbon offset schemes are still considered to be an acceptable means of financing climate smart agriculture,¹⁴ even though they rely on carbon being absorbed by soils (a process which is only temporary) and would increase land grabbing from smallholder farmers, particularly in the Global South.

Agroecology: the people's solution

Agroecology is a powerful combination of agricultural practices, an alternative socio-economic system and a political movement which combines traditional farming practices and ecological principles, provides numerous rich alternatives to destructive industrial agriculture.

As an agricultural practice agroecology focuses on enhancing the conditions needed for farming—building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, managing biodiversity dynamically, and conserving energy. For the same reason it does not involve the use of agrotoxins, artificial hormones, or genetically modified organisms. Elements of agroecology include agro-forestry, pastoralism, integrated pest management, farmer-led plant breeding, traditional fishing, and sustainable watershed management.

It also has important social and political aspects. For example, it recognises that peoples and communities have the right to maintain their relationship with their lands. It promotes food sovereignty and self-governance by communities, and firmly rejects handing over control to corporations. It values peoples' wellbeing and life over corporate profits. As a political movement agroecology is an action agenda to achieve food sovereignty led by small-scale food producers.

Agroecology is also a practical and proactive way of both adapting to and mitigating climate change. In a world of uncertainty—with respect to rising temperatures, erratic

rainfall patterns, droughts and floods, and the emergence of unfamiliar pests and diseases—it promotes sustainable and resilient agricultural and food systems, including by supporting local knowledge transfer and on-farm experimentation. Importantly it helps to reduce carbon emissions by decreasing fossil fuel use (with organic, local and more labour-intensive production). It has a positive effect on biodiversity, by conserving and using diverse plant, seed and animal varieties. It does not involve the destruction of vast swathes of the world's forests. There is strong evidence that agroecology can dramatically increase yields especially in the developing world, while reducing costs for food producers.¹⁵

In February 2015 global movements of small-scale food producers came together in a landmark forum in Nyeleni, Mali, to deepen their joint concept of agroecology, and identify threats to it, including CSA. Friends of the Earth International supports this joint concept of agroecology, and is working closely with rural and urban small-scale producers, consumers, local communities, and their representatives (especially members of La Via Campesina, the global peasant farmers' movement) to achieve it. We can already see that agroecology offers farmers and communities a very real alternative, even in countries where governments are strongly in favour of industrial export-oriented agriculture. For example, in the US, thriving local and regional food systems are being built, even though big agribusiness still dominates US politics.

Women make up the majority of the world's small-scale food producers and play a vital role in traditional agriculture, yet they are consistently denied access to land, and technical and financial assistance. So our member groups—in countries such as El Salvador, Ghana, Malaysia and Togo—are supporting subsistence women farmers. Projects include dedicated agroecology training courses (on topics such as composting, agroforestry, seed banks and sustainable fishing), improving women's access to food processing facilities, recording women's traditional knowledge about the uses and benefits of medicinal plants, and encouraging women's participation in decision-making.

Agroecology also focuses on protecting and reviving traditional knowledge about seeds and foods. For example, our group in Uruguay collaborates with others through the Native Seeds Network in Uruguay, organising the National Meeting of Producers and Seed Production, and the National Native Seed Festival. Similarly, Friends of the Earth Uganda is helping communities to document, recover and protect indigenous seed varieties, including by establishing seed banks and reviving indigenous practices.

Agroecology puts the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons back in the hands of the people who feed the world. This is why it cannot be coopted or replaced by 'Climate Smart Agriculture'.

Mobilise to build peoples' power for food sovereignty and climate justice

Instead of Climate Smart Agriculture, Friends of the Earth International and our allies are calling for a transformation in agriculture and food production based on food sovereignty, agroecology and the relocalisation of food systems. This is the real win-win option: it offers the world a way of mitigating climate change, fighting hunger effectively, and protecting forests and biodiversity.

To do this we need to take bold and decisive action. Real climate solutions are already out there in farmers' fields, but they need to be protected, promoted AND enhanced. Instead of backing food corporations, our governments must put in place public policies to support agroecological production controlled by small-scale producers. Resources need to be shifted from intensive industrial agriculture and meat production, to agroecology, food sovereignty, and support for small-scale food producers.

Scaling-up agroecology will require long-term efforts to ensure political recognition, an enabling public policy environment and significant changes to agricultural and food governance. It will also involve support for different types of research and knowledge sharing (such as peasant-to-peasant methodology for example), and specific actions to empower women.

Some key steps in this direction already took place in 2015, with the social movements International Forum on Agroecology held in Nyeleni, Mali, in February 2015. Even the Pope's Encyclical on the environment,¹⁶ which embraces agroecological farming to feed the world and improve well-being, is supporting what social movements have been saying for a long time.

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Towards Paris COP 21 and beyond

We unite to fight the co-optation of agroecology by Climate Smart Agriculture at Paris COP 21 and beyond!

Mobilise together to demand public support for agroecology around the FAO regional seminars on agroecology in November AND BEYOND
www.fao.org/about/meetings/afns/en/

Disseminate the report and declaration from the International Forum on Agroecology at Nyeleni as widely as possible and use it as a tool to discuss local solutions!
www.foodsovereignty.org

Find out more about agroecology and food sovereignty

Friends of the Earth International

www.foei.org/what-we-do/food-sovereignty

International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty

www.foodsovereignty.org/blog/

La Via Campesina

www.viacampesina.org

Olivier de Schutter

www.srfood.org/en/report-agroecology-and-the-right-to-food



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